

How My Heart Behaves

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Summary

Will and Hannibal are living together, post-Fall, on a small island called Vakkreheim in the Baltic Sea. They are pretending to be a married couple, Thom and Eirik Buckley. This is The Cupboard Incident that Ernesta teases him about in Are The Riders Coming... Thanks to everyone who has been reading my stuff. You are all very kind.xxxxxx

“So...how long d’you think we should stay in here?”

Will has commandeered the only chair in the dusty storage cupboard.

He is fully the dragon-war veteran, with his combat trousers and his honourable wounds, and his scarred, sullen beauty.

Hannibal wedges himself in between a dismantled overhead projector and a selection of balding brooms. His back is pressed against two drums of what he suspects, from the creeping corrosion cannibalising other nearby supplies, is poorly-stored, industrial strength weed-killer.

Despite the discomfort, he answers Will promptly.

“For verisimilitude? Twenty-one and a half minutes.”

Will stops idly trying to fix the bolt on the broken armrest and raises an eyebrow. “That’s a very *exact* estimate.”

Hannibal flexes his shoulders to ease the cramp.

Will looks; he cannot help *that*.

“I was a young man once, William,” Hannibal reproves. “Unfettered, curious about what the world of pleasure had to offer, and a medical student, with all the attendant anatomical knowledge and necessary narcissism that entails.”

He wipes the cobwebs out of his face.

“But, of course, I am offering an average time for clandestine liaisons in confines resembling this wretched closet. And, be assured, I have based it upon various sexual experiences I have gained over *many years, and not just the exhilarating escapades of my youth.*”

Will bites his thumbnail, displeased. He sits less comfortably in his malodorous bunker.

If he asks, Hannibal will tell. That is the way it is with them, these days.

Hannibal allows his smile to appear nostalgic.

Will scowls outright.

At least now there is something else to focus on, besides the late Professor S B Mussterbergen.

And that, Hannibal feels, from a purely psychiatric point of view, is progress.

That the man was a pioneer of forensic psychology is not in question.

That Will should mourn his passing quite so dolorously is.

Denial accompanied them on their morning walk;

“A mediocre intellect? Pedestrian methodologies? Hannibal, have you even read his seminal work on schemata and memory?”

At the luncheon table, extra places were set for Anger and Acceptance;

“Why shouldn’t I write him fan letters? I was a lonely kid at college. I got his autograph at a seminar he did and he seemed to like me, ok? I never actually thought he and I...never mind. Can’t happen now, can it?”

It is at this point in Will’s spiralling steps of Grief, that, for reasons of research, Hannibal reads the obituaries littering their browser history.

He is unimpressed.

S B Mussterbergen was handsome, in a predictably American way, but many, many years older than Will.

Later on, Hannibal orders them a water taxi. They are attending a public health meeting in Saltvikar, because they are civic-minded archipelagic residents.

It is also fictitious Thomas Buckley’s fictitious birthday, and so Will had been planning a celebratory visit to the new microbrewery on their principal island.

Now, he does not seem to care one way or another.

Hannibal begins to brim over with rational and objective criticisms of the deceased Professor that he is not permitted to express. Deciding to sublimate his animadversions entirely, he books them a table at the atrocious bistro on the waterfront. The one with the dishwater bisque and the bland desserts.

And so, they arrive, in silence, at pleasant, provincial Saltvikar.

The market square is charming, and the wind unobjectionable.

Throughout their stroll to the town hall, however, Will’s fingers are firmly entwined, not with those of Hannibal, but with a tenacious siren known as Melancholy.

For the first time in months, Hannibal does not know what to do with his hands.

“You cannot deny that Mussterbergen failed to realise that physiological differences in arousal arise from many reasons other than intentional deception,” Hannibal is now gritting his teeth as they find their seats in the auditorium. “It is thus that his theories have been so swiftly superseded.”

“By dwarves standing on the shoulders of giants.” Will frowns, sliding even further away from Hannibal on their shared pew. “And before you say anything, I am aware that I am quoting John of Salisbury, twelfth-century philosopher and educationalist, and not Sir Isaac Newton.”

He crosses his arms, chin on his chest.

Hannibal is about to state that John was himself actually repeating something first said by Bernardus Cartonensis, twelfth-century Neo-Platonist and scholar, but at that point the lights dim and Officer Eckblad begins her presentation on waste disposal and septic tank etiquette.

Moments into the first page of regulations, which Officer Eckblad herself does not appear to fully understand or particularly wish to communicate to anyone, Will glides angrily back along the well-worn wood.

“Credibility. Integrity. These are legitimate contributions to any discipline. He inspired,” Will tells Hannibal. “I concur that forensic investigation as a field of study has taken leaps forward in identifying the efficacy of physiological tests, and maybe some of Stevie’s earliest theories were not as rigorously objective as those that provide a standard model today, but...”

Will is interrupted by a cough.

Behind their seating is Axel Aho.

And he is glaring at the Buckleys.

And something in the lawyer’s expression signals to Will and Hannibal that they have erred, and not merely by blocking Axel’s view of the podium.

Lawyer Aho is a bigot.

But, he is not, in a more general way, unintelligent. In fact, he is known, and sometimes employed, for his unpleasant cleverness.

Thom Buckley has no business discussing anything beyond sailboats and Eirik Buckley’s sweet ass, and all of the Sarvia archipelago knows this.

Lawyer Aho knows this.

Will turns and blinks at Hannibal, upon whom an ominous stillness is falling.

Will sees it drift down over Hannibal, over his neat hair and his straight shoulders and his composed comportment, and it is something gossamer and predatory, a diaphanous dawning of darkness.

He blinks again and pictures Hannibal, completely stripped, arranged on their bed, the rigid lines of him canopied only in a filmy veil of black material, draped entirely in ebony gauze, the translucent fabric accentuating, shadowing and sheer, waiting to be torn apart.

Layers of obscuration and revelation, devilry and delight.

Layers that Will has a lifetime, now, to enjoy. Layers that are only for him to enjoy.

So, Will shakes his head, once.

It is his fault.

They have been biting at each other with their true fangs, which is not the correct way for fugitive monsters to behave.

Their web of forged documentation and histories spun of falsehoods is tightly-woven and steely, and it will not fail them, but fake identities also hang very much upon a single silken suggestion; believe in that which I show you.

So, Will and Hannibal are most likely going to have to kill Axel Aho.

Hannibal looks resigned to it immediately.

Will swallows. His pulse bounds at the thought of Hannibal, mantled in translucence, then mantled in blood.

But there is an alternative.

Languidly, he pushes up closer to Hannibal, and puts his hand on Hannibal's upper thigh. His very upper thigh.

Hannibal, to do him justice, remains reasonably unaffected.

"Come on, babe," Thom wheedles, and not quietly. "We tried the role-play your way, but all that bullshit psycho-babble really doesn't rock my world. Now we get to try my thing. Even-Stevens, remember, Eirik?"

Will swirls his fingers. Hannibal's muscles tense. Will does it again; up and across, this time, finding Hannibal's hardness and dragging his nails in a kind of a figure-of-eight pattern.

Hannibal stares intently at a map Officer Eckblad is holding up showing paint-can disposal sites.

"It's my birthday, babe," Thom pouts. "You promised."

Lawyer Aho watches in disgust, as Will crowds Hannibal, pushing him off the pew. They stumble into the aisle of the auditorium and clatter up the steps at the back.

Thom, it would be reasonable to say, is handsy.

Officer Eckblad pauses as the Buckleys wriggle through the doors and out into the lobby. There are some mutters of outrage.

Ernesta barks long and loud from the front row, like a particularly irrepressible and be-whiskered seal.

Will stops them by a side-door in the lobby. By the signage and all architectural logic, the room within is janitorial in nature.

"This is unnecessary. I have the appropriate equipment at home. On the shelf in the laundry. Plastic gloves. Leak-proof sheeting."

Hannibal sounds offended, but does not disengage from his fake husband's clutches, and Will is comforted to know that it is not just the thought of slaughtering a lawyer that has brought a red staining to Hannibal's cheekbones.

Will has missed touching Hannibal, even if for one miserable goddamn day. He refrains from smiling, however, as he is still, officially, in mourning.

"Defaulting to destruction is fine, but that particular pig does have a wife and a couple mistresses. One of them might miss him. So, get inside, *Eirik*."

Hannibal opens the door and grimaces at the smell. He has just had his cashmere dry-cleaned and hand-picked clean of dog hair.

"Look, a few minutes of pretending, then we go back to the show in a state of post-coital harmony." Will shuts them in and switches on a grimly yellow lightbulb. "Thom's reputation

as loose, louche and lazy is reset, and we don't have to feed Sandy and Conn anything with unsavoury opinions on same-sex marriages."

But the subterfuge will be unconvincing if Will continues to glower, as he has done for the past three minutes.

And Hannibal does not want to permanently compromise his palate by prolonged contact with bleach fumes.

So, he inclines his head, and he dims the bright candle of his professional pride.

"Professor Mussterbergen's work on eye witness accounts held merit," he lies.

"You think so?" Will is ridiculously appealing when he is hopeful. "He was very kind. Not cynical." Will stands. "I thought that it showed you could deal with bad people day in and day out without becoming one yourself."

Hannibal imagines briefly what he would have made of Will Graham back then. Sharp-witted and sensitive. Pretty beyond comprehension.

Possibly moral beyond corruption.

"You feel either that you have let your idol down by living with me," Hannibal says quietly, "or that he was wrong to disregard that hoary old Nietzschean adage regarding those who battle monsters."

"Oh, I worked out soon enough that Professor Mussterbergen was more than a little naive."

Will puts out both of his hands, and Hannibal takes them. "No-one can be unsullied by criminology if they're doing it right. And as for being able to look into your abyss? I have always been what I am. You didn't make me, Hannibal, you just saw what others didn't and still valued it."

He leans across the miniscule space between them, that has somehow been a such a dreary chasm all day, and kisses Hannibal, once.

"If that man, in any way, led you down the paths you chose," Hannibal says truthfully, "then I am thankful. Eventually, your course and my course aligned."

"Maybe we should set our course back to the auditorium," Will shrugs, "it was probably a really dumb idea anyhow."

"As you wish." Hannibal nods, adding kindly, "we can always simply abduct and kill Aho instead."

Will reaches up towards Hannibal's hair. "Since we're here, think I should just ruffle this up a little? For verisimilitude?"

"By all means. Shall I untuck this?"

Hannibal slips his arms around Will and tugs at the back of Will's undershirt. His fingers stroke Will's waist, his warm skin, without conscious thought.

"Yeah," Will sighs. "I could do your shirt up all wrong. That's a thing, isn't it?"

Misbuttoning."

Will is methodical. It takes a *long* time. His hands stray and splay as he flicks each button open.

"Didn't you ever admire someone when you were just starting out? Kind of put them on a pedestal?"

“Hero worship?” Hannibal is shivering under Will’s attentions, despite the close heat of the room. “I had no villains to lionize; by implication, a successful multiple murderer must remain unknowable.”

Hannibal watches Will’s eyes. The blue begins to burn a little fiercer. He pulls Will to him by the hipbones.

“There has only ever been one person I have thought worthy of observation and interaction. Worthy of pursuing, of courting.”

Will bends his head. Collarbones curve beneath his tongue. Hollows and contours invite exploration.

“Yeah?” Will breathes. “Lucky guy.”

He kisses up towards Hannibal’s throat. His jaw. By the time their lips meet Hannibal would willingly bathe in industrial strength weed-killer so long as Will doesn’t stop. He undoes Will’s belt and tugs down his baggy trousers and bares him.

Will looks at Hannibal a little differently to how he usually looks at Hannibal in these moments.

“Gonna give me my birthday present, babe?”

Thom asks it in a whisper.

Hannibal fights down his own instinct, which is to bite Will hard on his neck until it bleeds, and then suck the very marrow from his scalding, straining flesh.

Eirik Buckley would be more delicate. Less sure.

“Our pleasure is your gift to me, Thom,” he says, hesitantly, as Eirik might. “A gift I can never deserve.”

He starts to stroke Will very gently, long strokes that take an eternity to complete. “I have never believed in god, and yet here you are, divine.”

He touches Thom’s flushing body as if he is entirely a thing of glory and halation, cupping and defining and teasing, making him glow, making him rapturous.

“I have never thought communion with god possible, yet here you are, my sacrament.”

He kneels down. He kisses, softly as Eirik would, open-mouthed, wet venerations that proceed from belly, to hip, to cock. His lips brush and smooth and promise. And his husband, whether he is really a husband or not, moves, forward and back, small, painful throbs of exultation spearing at his spine.

Hannibal scents Will and it is lovely. He tastes Will and it is sublime. Will is devastating, catastrophic, his own personal Armageddon.

“I have never believed in the soul,” he murmurs, dreamily, “and yet surely you must be mine.”

Hannibal looks up. Will looks down.

“I love you.”

It is very, very quiet in the cupboard. Neither of them breathes. There is no sound. No motion. There are only those words.

They are fragile, yet unbreakable.

They are motes of improbability and marvel, sparkling in the air between them.

“You mean it.”

“I do.” Hannibal is as surprised as Will.

“Come here.”

Hannibal rises, not even brushing off the dust.

They hold each other, hands linked around Will. Mouths together.

The rhythm of it is deliberate, sombre, it builds in Will like a long, escalating line of plainsong, syllables of sensation soaring and stretching unbearably. Hannibal leads, fingers twisting, so that Will can immerse himself in the sweetness of his own responses. He arches his body towards the ineffable, towards ecstasy, towards love.

Afterwards, Will cannot open his eyes.

If those words were a delirium, or a delusion, then the waking from it would kill him.

“Took longer than your average, then,” Will smiles shakily.

And Hannibal no longer trusts himself to speak.

They clean up and turn the light off and go through the door into the lobby together. They are arm-in-arm, although how they are linked is not really as simple as arm-in-arm. There are layers to their linking; misrepresentations, brutal honesties, difficult truths and easy lies.

They have been colleagues, friends, rivals, enemies.

And now, it seems, they are sweethearts.

The lobby is bright as a razor, after the dim confessional of the cupboard.

There are also about twenty people walking through it, heading towards the front door.

Including Aho, Officer Eckblad and Inspector Daniel Linna.

They have all just left the public health meeting. They all turn and stare.

But Will and Hannibal can only see each other.

And Ernesta looks at their expressions and she sighs, remembering.

And just for once, she does not laugh.

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